

## Saving the Northern Sierra

By Greyson Howard, Union News Service

TRUCKEE — Gems of the northern Sierra — from granite cliffs and lofty peaks to verdant wetlands and rugged canyons, adding up to thousands of acres — preserved.

Including popular destinations like the Palisade Creek Trail and Mount Lola Trail, as well as remote wilderness like Gray Creek and Pierce Meadows, it's safe to say the Truckee Donner Land Trust isn't resting on its laurels.

“Some truly landmark property in the region is now protected forever,” said Perry Norris, executive director of the land trust. “Given our tourist-driven, recreation-driven economy, land conservation crosses all political lines. Protecting land in a recreation destination just makes sense for the economy.”

The recent hard-fought wins, despite the down economy, include Pierce Meadows, west of Truckee just north of the Eagle Lakes exit on Interstate 80; five pieces of property in Gray Creek, just west of Floriston; part of Devil's Peak on Donner Summit; and Billy Mack Canyon, on Donner Lake's west end.

That adds up to nearly 2,000 new acres of open space.

And while most of these took months, or even years, of negotiation, some came down to the wire when making the deal, Norris said.

“It's never a dull moment; though it can move at glacial speed — within one week we found out we weren't going to receive a grant we expected, and then the Sierra Nevada Conservancy awarded us \$1 million toward Cold Stream. Had we not got that we would have lost this deal,” Norris said.

The economic downturn has required chasing different funding sources to keep the momentum going, he said.

And with a potential of \$50 million more in open space transactions in the works, things aren't slowing down going into the future.

Norris said he couldn't be too specific on the upcoming deals, as some are sensitive, but the land trust will need continued support from the public.

### Forming partnerships

Truckee Donner Land Trust can't do it on its own, however, Norris said, as conservation work has been done as part of the Northern Sierra Partnership, working with groups like the Trust For Public Land.

Dave Sutton, director of the Trust For Public Land's Sierra Program, said the partnership couldn't have come at a better time, considering the economic climate.

“We prioritizing work together, allocating funds together and raising capital together — this isn't just cooperation, it's collaboration,” Sutton said.

The five groups composing the Northern Sierra Partnership — Feather River Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Business Council, Trust for Public Land and Truckee Donner Land Trust — have raised \$30 million so far, he said.

“It's almost unfathomable the opportunity for conservation right now,” Sutton said. “A lot of priorities are in play, often at reduced cost. The flip-side is it's harder to come up with funds.”

Open to the public

The Truckee Donner Land Trust isn't just setting aside pristine swaths of land to be untouched and unseen — it is building trails and creating access for the public to enjoy.

“We're heavily into the trail and recreation side of land conservation, so it's a doggone good thing we have John,” Norris said.

John Svahn is the land trust's stewardship director, with experience building and maintaining trails for the land trust and Truckee Trails Foundation.

In Perazzo Meadows, a new trail is in the works to access the Little Truckee River, with signage along the way — planned to start this spring.

In Waddle Ranch in the Martis Valley, another trail would loop around Beacon Hill, overlooking the valley, Svahn said.

Cold Stream, Devil's Peak and Paradise Valley (400 acres along the Pacific Crest Trail) all help protect existing trails too, Svahn said.